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WAS THERE MANDRAKE IN THE CESTUS OF VENUS?

The article in the November number on the marble Aphrodité detected by a sharp-sighted Florentine in the Palazzo Altoviti has had some echo in the archaeological press. The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester, England has a paper by Dr. J. Rendel Harris of Cambridge in which he advances a curious theory regarding the *kestos*, the magical weapon of Aphrodité, which this statue, now the property of Mr. John D. Rockefeller, carries draped over the right hand. It is Dr. Harris's belief that various gods of Greece can be traced back to certain trees or plants that were thought to have curative and magical qualities by the early peoples about the Mediterranean; in several articles he has maintained this thesis with regard to Apollo, Artemis and Dionysos. With respect to Aphrodité, it is the mandrake or mandragora so much mentioned by the ancients and by the poets and herbalists of the middle ages as a root endowed with dreadful powers, that he fixes upon as the "root" of the cult of Aphrodité.

If not entirely convincing, he brings together much curious and long-forgotten lore. He suggests that the "apple" held by many statues of Aphrodité in one hand is the round golden fruit of the mandrake. But with regard to the *kestos*, he advances the idea that its magical, love-dispensing qualities immortalized by Homer in the fourteenth Iliad may be carried back to the powers ascribed by primitive folk to this singular plant. One reason for the well-known virtues of the mandrake as a charm comes from the fact that occasionally the root is found bifurcated, and by skilful handling can be made to assume the rude effigy of a human being! In some cases the mandrake was used for love-magic. Hence Dr. Harris concludes that the embroidered strap that Aphrodité carried "is the belt of mandrake roots which the women of ancient times wore next their skin." To him, Homer was referring to magic-casting herbs when he spoke of Love, Desire and Persuasion among the powers of the cestus of Venus. In Derby's translation Juno says to Venus:

Give me the loveliness and power to charm
Whereby thou reign'st o'er gods and men supreme
and after Venus has gracefully acquiesced, we are told of the love-charm:

Then Venus spoke, and from her bosom loosed
Her broidered Cestus, wrought with every charm
To win the heart; there Love, there young Desire,
There fond Discourse, and there Persuasion dwelt.

So far we have no other instance of a marble Venus the size of life which retains the *kestos*, although small bronzes and terra-cottas and seals are known that show it; also several vase paintings; often it has been mistaken for a girdle, a necklace or a flower.

* * *

Among the January exhibitions few were more remarkable for beautiful objects than the collection of Chinese, Rhodian and Greek pieces of porcelain and pottery shown at the American Art Galleries prior to a sale. It belonged to Mr. Thomas B. Clarke and disperses a very large stock of the finest kera-

mics, such as are sure to make the mouths of collectors water. Particularly delightful were the vases in white with a discreet decoration in low relief, perhaps just a loop of flower-stalk across the highest swell of the vase-body, rising again into a simple flower or leaf ornament, the outline of the vase exquisite in its refinement of outline, the proportions of neck, body and foot most satisfying, the combination stamped with an elegance rare of its kind. The blue vases, bowls and platters which rise above the high levels of ceramic art were numerous, most of them solid-color blues with effects produced by darker shades in a constantly varied series of patterns. The Rhodian platters with their bold flower decorations on cream ground, the lustre pieces from the Levant and Spain, the Greek vases for wine and oil, belonging, not to the greatest art period, but a later, in which the feeling for art still lingered among the decorators of pottery, the Italian vases of the later Renaissance—all of these contained specimens of singular beauty. It was the Chinese pottery and porcelain, however, which held the lead, not merely in quantity but quality. For many years Mr. Clarke has had a buyer resident in China whose taste and skill were notable. This buyer died recently and perhaps his death was one of the reasons for the disposal of the collections.

* * *

An exhibition of work by the late William M. Chase will be held at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, including loans of pictures from all parts of his career. One of his earliest and best paintings "Ready for the Ride," belonging to the Union League Club was lent to the Winter Show of the Academy of Design and held a favored position on the north wall of the Vanderbilt Gallery.

A PLAN TO AID SELF-RESPECTING ARTISTS

The arts in their beneficent variety have the merit of bringing relief to the humdrum that desolates life—that is merely to regard them from the humblest standpoint! Dextrously, suavely, without hurry, they edge our attention over melancholy passages, dim and vacuous, ravaged by Ennui. They supply subjects of interest to some natures that otherwise might turn to coarse pleasures like drinking and gambling, gorging and war; beside that, they afford delight of the keenest sort to other natures more readily affected by objects of the kind.

Even do they go in certain cases so far as to compete with religion. For which reason they have found relentless foes among the reformers who have lacked the necessary breadth and humor to conciliate the two and make them friends—compare Erasmus with Calvin.

In fine, the arts are able to add so much to the joy of living, they may be called sweeteners of life.

This being pretty generally accepted, would not one imagine that the persons who are trained to create objects of the arts, and do produce them with more or less talent and skill, would occupy a privileged place in the community, analogous, let us say, to that of bards among the primitive clans of Gaul and the British Isles?

Very far is this from being the case. In the rough and tumble of life we allow nothing to artists by way of advantage over laborers, tradesmen, artisans,

unless it be an advantage to enjoy more chances to see their names in print, unless furthermore we maintain for their behoof museums in which works of old and modern art are huddled together as well as the wall and floor spaces permit. These latter, however, amassed in galleries and museums, are really not brought together so much for artists as for the general public.

And yet the artists now alive are the builders of living native art.

And yet hereafter, the period of time now slipping by will be searched by writers on civilization for what traces of the arts as well as of literature, philosophy, statesmanship it may reveal. Illuminated by their researches, these times of ours must stand or fall in the esteem of men of the coming ages as a period either to be regarded with approval for its culture or flouted for its materialism and dulness of wit.

What are we doing for the artist who is at grips with destiny, fighting the common fight for bread—too anxious about what is coming to his family to give the needful brooding-time to his ideas?

Well, we are doing just about as nearly nothing as one can imagine. Some paintings, water-colors, pastels are placed for sale at the galleries of dealers or are shown for short sessions by exclusive art societies or clubs. But all that scarcely more than nibbles at the fringes—so large is the output of art-things in New York alone, so populous is the local profession of the arts! The country needs the work of these men and women. The level of its cultivation is now and hereafter will be gauged by such products. And yet the simplest, most elementary form of encouragement is not offered artists and art workers; namely, a place where they can meet buyers and offer the product of their brains!

Artists, it need scarcely be said, are not candidates for charitable schemes. They stand on their own feet and are ready to give a fair exchange for what they receive. Yet in view of the fact that they cannot build it themselves, they may fairly ask for a hall or halls where at small expense they might dispose of their work by auction or by individual sale, and thus relieve at once any stress of want. A bazar, a market—call it what you will—which at all seasons of the year is open to the public for bargaining, is the most imperative need of the art world to-day—under such restrictions, of course, as any exchange must maintain in order to keep bright a reputation for honesty and efficiency as well as quality.

I venture to say that at present this is the most pressing problem in the local world of art, namely, a method for bringing together the maker and the buyer of art.

Quite true that each season brings forth two exhibition of pictures and sculptures held by the Academy of Design, that several other societies exist for water-color and pastel painters, that the Society of Craftsmen looks after some of the workers in the industrial or applied arts, so far as it can, in admirable fashion. There are even specific organizations which try to help the young artist, such being the Art Alliance in which Mrs. Ripley Hitchcock takes a leading part, and the Friends of Young Artists wherein Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney is active and efficient. All these are commendable and worthy of aid. But from the nature of things their function

must remain limited to a very small part of the art-folk. Nor could it be fair to fail to mention clubs like the National Arts, Lotos, Salmagundi and Union League that do much which is helpful for sculptors and painters and in the case of the Arts Club, much for the craftsmen through annual exhibitions. Art dealers likewise give aid in various ways. But the field is so large, the number of artists and artisans so great, that all these outlets together do not meet the problem. The call is for a permanent open market for art products, accessible to artist and buyer at all seasons.

The general public, considered apart from collectors and amateurs, cannot if it would, have access to the exhibitions made by Societies of artists and clubs, and in fact does not care for them anyhow! The average man and woman has not time to look up dates and places, still less is he or she disposed to seek artists in their studios. If there were an established market or exchange for such objects as are made here by members of the army of workers, the citizen could find there what he wants or learn where it might be found. Properly administered, such a business would offer guarantees of low prices and sound workmanship and would be conducted without loss to the projectors. It might be started under the lead of the Arts Club, which has specialized as an institution devoted to the bringing together of the layman and artist. The Arts Club might well extend its beneficent work into larger circles of the citizens and workmen in the arts.

Modern times present a very different aspect toward the arts than did the days that are past. Even the last century was very different from the present. We are still hampered by old-world traditions regarding the dignity of art work; there are many prejudices inherited from the past which hinder progress, such, for one instance only, as the curious traditional forms of caste in the art world which impel artists and laymen to esteem pictures in oils above pictures in pastel, while all three exult over the engravers and other workers in black and white.

That's one side of the fallacy that the material or medium outweighs the spirit of a work of art. Then the paraphernalia, the "fuss and feathers" introduced by French and British academies to please the great and impose themselves on innocent groundlings wedded to such ideas, have had a baneful echo throughout the world. America, though protesting, has succumbed to the prevailing fashion. It is humbug; for at bottom it is an attempt to deny the simple fact that artists must live by the sweat of the brow, just like artisans, tradesmen and those who labor with their trowel and axe, pick and shovel. Far more picturesque and graceful is that fancy which spells how the magnates of central governments and the Church encouraged artists and skilled artisans, collected art works that are now part of public museums and art galleries abroad—and deserved well of their own generation by so doing. But even if we should desire a return to that vanished Age of Gold (as we might persuade ourselves it was—and not a wasteful Pinchbeck Age) still would the matter be a purely empty academic discussion—for that age is gone and modernity knows it not.

No, the artist primarily is a workman who has goods to sell and the grievance that nine out of ten artists have to ventilate is the fact that their fellow-citizens are not far-sighted enough to provide a

place where they can put their goods before the public and obtain for them whatever the day may bring.

Such a mart would be democratic in the sense of giving a chance to the poor as well as the rich, to the struggling apprentice as well as the master.

Such a market would not be one haunted by millionaires, for they have purveyors for their own investments in art, but for the average citizen who wishes to get something charming, or useful and charming for his office, his club, his library, his household. Nor would it be so much used for the sale of work by masters already formed by clients and admirers, but for those who have not made such connections, the artist who must live, even if he has to sell his work at a lower figure than he thinks fair. It would be a place for quick sales and bargains, auctions from time to time, cash payments and immediate deliveries. The local press, which has always been liberal to the artists in an unprecedented degree, mentioning their work unstintedly and without reward, would give to any such movement the tremendous aid of publicity; for it would not aim to be a money-making concern, but an effort to help American art in the simplest, most efficacious way.

As soon as the location of such an art mart became generally fixed in mind, buyers and bargain-hunters would flow in, not merely from the great surrounding city, but from places far and wide. Everybody would soon realize that it formed a permanent institution open every week-day throughout the year. Part of its organization might well include a bureau of information where the names and addresses of workers in various branches could be had; in other words, the market might be run on the broadest principles of fairness to the whole of the art world.

Let us resume:

1. New York contains the largest population of artists of any city in the world.
2. New York has many small exhibitions for

certain branches of the fine arts and a few of the industrial, but these meet scarcely a tithe of the demand.

3. New York has thousands of artists but no provision for the immediate sale of their works.
4. New York has no well-placed, permanent halls for the disposal of art work by local artists, open all the year round to the public without charge.

"How shall I reach the public?" is the query that agitates the breasts of the great majority of artists. There is no common ground open to all, reflects the artist, where I can find out whether anybody in this vast commonwealth cares enough for my work to offer a pittance for it.

Strange, and yet so it is! Could it not be remedied? Are there no people with capital who would hazard enough to try out the matter of an art market? If there should be a small deficit the first year, the second year would more than liquidate it. That is what many, many hundreds of talented men and women are thinking and saying—sculptors and painters, engravers on stone, steel, copper and wood, artistic photograph makers, firers of porcelain and pottery, makers of enamels—why enumerate? "When are we to have fair play, and an open market?"

Holland and Flanders once had somewhat similar markets in several of her larger towns. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were active local exchanges and marts for works of art. At Dordrecht, as John Evelyn tells us, the municipality gave the use of the old Mont de Piété or "Pand," and he describes the bustle there, as pictures, sculptures and engravings were bought and sold, some for home consumption, others for export to all parts of the world. London has a survival of similar ventures in "Christie's." If we do not take care promptly of our rising generation of artists, we shall not have any American art worthy of consideration.

